

National Landscape Conservation System Summit
November 16, 2010 Focus Group Sessions

Focus Group 4: Raising Awareness of NLCS

Note: This document summarizes comments from both BLM employees and non-BLM stakeholders during three focus group sessions held on Tuesday, November 16, 2010. These comments represent neither the consensus opinions of the group attending the session nor the official positions of the BLM.

Internal Awareness

- Discussions on internal awareness focused on the observation that the BLM continues to struggle with how to integrate the NLCS into the overall agency mission. What sets NLCS apart from, and how is it part of, the general BLM? It was noted that cultural change takes time.
- A number of BLM employees do not understand the NLCS, what designations are included, how they became a part of the system, or how they are managed differently than other BLM lands. This provides a barrier to successful outreach, because if the mission is not understood within the agency, it makes it more difficult to raise external awareness.
- Need to focus on internal communications during the next year or so. Many of the messages developed for external audiences will be appropriate for an internal audience as well. BLM employees are important ambassadors of the system, yet they must understand it to explain it.
- A set of “talking points” is needed to help BLM employees deliver consistent messages about NLCS to the public.
- There is some internal resentment over the special attention, and budget, provided to NLCS. There is a perception among some that the NLCS is the only program in the BLM that focuses on conservation. This creates communication barriers.
- The BLM needs more integration between programs, and more “horn tooting” (promoting what we do). “Tell our story and spell it out.” Everyone in BLM is responsible.
- Develop a primer for BLM employees that includes the NLCS history, BLM Director Bob Abbey’s speeches, former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt’s speeches, etc.

External Awareness

- Audiences
 - There are many audiences. Different audiences may require different messages and methods of delivery.
 - Diverse approach to make a compelling case that our lands are relevant to everyone (diverse social, economic, age, cultural groups). Audiences include internal, national and local, recreation, scientific, government, politicians, youth, educators, tourist offices.
 - Reach those who reach others for a multiplier effect. Artists, businesses, and partners can spread the word very effectively.
 - Develop approaches to reach underserved constituents—urban, eastern, people who never see the land. The audience is larger than those who will visit an area, including virtual visitors, young urban dwellers, etc
 - Partners provide training and produce magazines and newsletters for their members. They also provide a local connection and put a face on the message—something the media wants.

- Don't overlook the baby boomers as they provide political capital and volunteer work.
- Audiences that may be the minority now will be the majority in 40 years.
- Gateway communities can support and enhance the experience of the recreating public, while promoting stewardship.
- Market to Resource Advisory Councils (RACs).
- Reach out to entities that may consider themselves adversaries of BLM. May not create a supporter, but can neutralize an opponent.
- Important to also reach out to non-traditional interests.
- Outreach Messages
 - Place Based
 - In almost every session, partners and BLM employees felt strongly that the message had to be about the place, not the system. Most people have allegiances to a place; narratives and stories are about places. Once the public is hooked on a place, then can highlight the BLM.
 - Knowledge of the system is important too, as the system provides for partnering, funding, and other support.
 - Many people are introduced to the system through a local area, and in some instances the materials for that area do not tie back into the larger system. There is an outreach opportunity in consistently tying the local area back to the larger system.
 - Need to keep message simple and local, but do need to relate back to BLM.
 - Connect to the Larger Ecosystem
 - The landscape focus helps distinguish the system. Talk about corridors and habitat connectivity. Aspects of ecosystems can be interesting, even to those who may never visit e.g. the popularity of "Planet Earth."
 - NLCS as a national savings bank for biodiversity.
 - Conservation and Values
 - Explain the idea of conservation as part of multiple use, whether it's conservation as multiple use or that conservation can happen with multiple use. This is an opportunity to show how the NLCS is part of BLM's mission. There is an expectation that NLCS areas are managed at a higher conservation level than most BLM lands.
 - Messages should discuss the values of the units, American heritage, and legacy. Some messages included freedom, openness, and risk involved. Need to be relevant to the public so they care about the messages.
 - Emphasize the self-discovery, self-exploration aspect of NLCS areas but also make sure the message engages the public to do more than just download a map and go to a trail point.
 - It is increasingly important to highlight the economic, ecological, and cultural value of the units. NLCS areas can boost local economies and may also be part of a lifestyle.
 - It is crucial to let the public know that areas are open/available, but that the experience is more natural and wild. Need to get this message out especially to sportsmen and hunters.

- Create appropriate use expectations—highlight, in a “non-controlling voice,” where we want people to go, what the visitor can do, when they can do it, any safety issues, and any costs.
- Need to use science and research as one way to tell NLCS and BLM story. NLCS units are showcase pieces, they are the best of the best, but there are centers of excellence in other areas. The research being done across BLM lands should be tied in. The science program can be used to identify values and benefits to the public.
- Need to try and capture the “spiritual” feeling of an area.
- Wildlife resonates with the public (even non-visiting public), incorporate into messages where appropriate.
- Organization of messages
 - Messages should be clear, concise, and consistent. Example—“no amenities, just you and the land.”
 - We need three levels of statement to help partners and BLM employees tell the NLCS story: 1) a one pager; 2) one paragraph; and 3) a description with no more than 5 bullet points. The one paragraph would act as an “elevator” speech.
 - Make sure the right message goes to right audience. Example given of a mountain biker using a trail, appealing to other mountain bikers, but maybe not best for hikers.
 - The BLM needs to get away from what we think people need to know and identify what the public wants to know.
 - It’s a landscape approach, it’s about partnering, and it’s still about BLM.
 - Should differentiate between National Park areas and Wildlife Refuges, in that NLCS focuses on landscapes, rather than features, so that the landscape management is tied more to biological and geological consequences of a management action.
 - How do we market and not destroy? (i.e. Increase visitation and protect the resources?)
- Message Delivery
 - Establish metrics for the next ten years, then evaluate to see if they are met—e.g. are we reaching specific target audiences? (raising everyone’s awareness may not be the goal)
 - Tie outreach efforts to “Metric Moments” such as anniversaries. Research indicates these are effective.
- Branding
 - It is important to “brand the system” by having standardized websites, messages, maps, brochures, etc. This would give people a certain understanding and expectation of NLCS lands throughout the country. Like Starbucks, people understand the brand, and seek out other Starbucks. Some people suggested a logo or symbol to tie NLCS areas together.
 - “Branding” goes beyond the media and written communications. Interactions with personnel (how they speak and dress) reflects on the image.
- Name Change
 - It is hard for the BLM to build a relationship between the public, BLM employees, and the System if the name cannot be easily pronounced.

- Lots of discussion on shortening the name, adopting a nickname, or taglines. Most agreed that the acronym should be ditched. Phrases should be catchy. One individual said that the National Park Service did a study and found they had little name recognition, so adopting a tagline that the public could relate to might help.
- Seek out a name that resonates with the public. Look at the study conducted by National Conservation Lands Foundation for ideas, but may need a professional to help. Use short and concise statements.
- Suggestions for nickname included Conservation System, BLM's Conservation Lands, BLM's Legacy Lands.
- If you could use a short name, always precede by "BLM's" in order to help tie it to the BLM. An example: "BLM's Conservation Lands."
- "Landscape" does not resonate with the public. Perhaps just need to educate public what "landscape" means. May need a different word. A common thread of NLCS is protected lands.
- NLCS Website, Internet, Social Media
 - The BLM has employees with skills in website development, interpretation, communication, GIS, and information technology. Need to make sure that all parties are part of developing the website or it won't be effective.
 - Website is focused on employees and is too bureaucratic. Content should be audience driven.
 - Needs to be multilayered, so that different levels of audience engagement can be reached. Current website is shallow and single dimensional. There is no way to drill down, or to go for further information.
 - Not answering the needs of the public, such as: what you can do safely, when you can do it, where you can do it.
 - Need to identify who is visiting the website and what their needs are.
 - Use social media to let users provide updated information such as trail or snow conditions.
 - Need to post good maps of areas. But be careful with using Google or MapQuest as they may not have most current BLM GIS information, or there may not be any information.
 - Don't reinvent – get ideas from other websites, use Google Earth, or other established web tools to get information or messages across. America's Great Outdoors website interface was fantastic. Have an aggressive, strategic approach to using social media and the internet.
 - Need to be consistent. Different areas have different layouts.
 - Link to other sites.
 - Consider more podcasts, kids, partners can contribute
- Other
 - Provide outreach tools for use by people working BLM's front desks. Can also have something similar to give to local businesses, libraries.
 - All units need maps
 - Develop a trip planning guide, like that for Chicago Basin (San Juan National Forest in Colorado) that was developed by volunteers.
 - Establish an artist in residence program.

- Need good visuals—videos and still images—to deliver story. Develop and improve image library. Videos can be part of information partners and the BLM use to educate groups.
- Provide posters to universities, REI, Boy Scout offices, libraries.

Partnering in outreach

- The BLM needs to highlight its partners at the local level. Discuss their interests and how NLCS depends on them for resources and volunteers.
- There's a huge role for NGOs/partners in promoting the importance of NLCS.
- Partners can reach a different audience by sponsoring training, public forums, and roundtables to discuss information. They also have a large network of other partner groups to reach out to.
- Partners can advertise and write articles in their own publications. Partner authorship gives rapport and grassroots feel to the advertising and articles. Partners offer credibility and a local connection for the media.
- Partners can attract and educate volunteers.
- Training volunteers about NLCS provides a larger sphere of influence as their knowledge spreads to other groups and partners. Informal education can be provided even during service projects.
- Use partners and social media to provide feedback on local conditions and events.
- If package of information or materials like a video is provided to partners with a consistent message, partners can visit local groups like the rotary club, church, or schools. Partners need tools and a message to do the outreach for NLCS.
- Partners may know better how to market NLCS.